

AMERICAN RAILROAD

Silkroad Ensemble with Rhiannon Giddens American Railroad

FEATURING ARTISTS

Rhiannon Giddens, banjo, voice, fiddle
Shawn Conley, bass
Pura Fé, lap-steel guitar, voice
Haruka Fujii, percussion
Sandeep Das, tabla
Karen Ouzounian, cello, voice
Mazz Swift, violin, voice
Niwel Tsumbu, guitar
Francesco Turrisi, frame drums, accordion
Kaoru Watanabe, Japanese flutes, percussion
Michi Wiancko, violin, voice
Wu Man, pipa
Yazhi Guo, suona, Chinese percussion

Swannanoa Tunnel / Canoe Song - Pura Fé

Far Down Far - Maeve Gilchrist

Swannanoa Tunnel / Steel-Driving Man - Traditional, arr. Rhiannon Giddens, Silkroad Ensemble *

Rela - Sandeep Das

Wíhaŋblapi Mázačhaŋku - Kite *

Rainy Day - Wu Man

Milimo - Niwel Tsumbu

INTERMISSION

Swannanoa Tunnel / Time Elapse - Wu Man, Arr. Zhang Haihui *

Have You Seen My Man? - Cecile McLorin Salvant *

Swannanoa Tunnel (quartet) - Traditional, arr. Silkroad Ensemble *

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^{*}Commissioned by Silkroad for American Railroad, 2023

PROGRAM

Swannanoa Tunnel / Canoe Song - Pura Fé

Gawinu is Canoe song. I created it to honor my NC Coastal Tuscarora Ancestors that lived on the Neuse River/Pamlico Sound...it went out into the Atlantic Oceans... Our Ancestral Waterways were our highways that connected us all... they were also our Indigenous family trees our mother earth bloodlines and Tribal territories...that ran up and down as opposed to the colonial state and county lines and rail road tracks that cut across severing the umbilical, natural flow of the land scape. I sing these songs to reclaim the old Ancestral Waterways... that will always be here.

Far Down Far - Maeve Gilchrist

Francis O'Neill was an Irish-born member of the Chicago Police Force who rose to Superintendent between 1873 and 1905. Chief O'Neill is also credited as having the single most influence on the evolution of Irish Music in the twentieth century due to his collection of Irish folk tunes and songs. Among his many published works is O'Neill's Music of Ireland, a collection of over 1,850 pieces of music. An Irish immigrant living in the US during the peak wave of migration, employed by the relatively new and deeply disorganized concept of a Police Force while also living a life deeply connected to the music of his homeland; his collection of tunes seemed a natural place to find a seed from which this composition grew. I was drawn towards a jig called "The Far Down Farmer". During my research into the Irish involvement in the building of the American Transcontinental Railroad, I read about the tension that existed on occasion between Catholic and Protestant workers. The Catholic workers, often from a more economically depressed background, were sometimes referred to as 'Far Downers'.

I took this simple, two-part jig, and deconstructed the vocabulary, using the motifs and intervals as if I were building a train, laying the tracks and allowing the melody to build up momentum and speed as it gets slung between our respective instruments. I hope that this composition pays tribute to the roots of the tune and the back-breaking work of the workers on both sides of the religious and cultural divide while allowing the melody to fly in the hands of women who would likely never have been given a fiddle or a flute, let alone a hammer to build with!

Swannanoa Tunnel / Steel-Driving Man - Traditional, arr. Rhiannon Giddens, Silkroad Ensemble *

"Swannanoa Tunnel" or "O Babe" originated from the black laborers who built the tunnel before crossing over into white culture. The black voices that created the song were soon forgotten, which has happened quite often within the African American experience. "Swannanoa Tunnel" is my tribute to the ghosts of the hard working men who gave their lives, yet whose stories have been forgotten and words claimed not as their own; a reminder of where this music truly comes from.

Much thanks to the incredible scholarship of Kevin Kehrberg & Jeffrey A. Keith, who painstakingly uncovered this story.

Rela - Sandeep Das

One of the most prominent aspects of Indian Classical Music is its deep-rooted tradition of improvisation that has been cultivated for over 4,000 years. In this piece, Sandeep Das offers a glimpse into that rich heritage, and will perform a traditional Tabla Rela, which is a type of improvisatory composition renowned for its high speeds, virtuosity, and cascades of complex notes and rhythms.

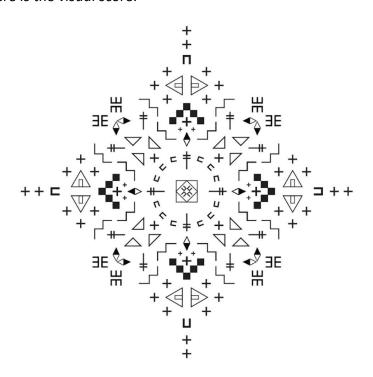
In Hindi, rela means "rail" or "train", and it is believed that modern Relas were created to mimic the sounds of the railways that first emerged during the British Raj (the era in which India was under British colonial rule). Many parallels can be drawn between the American Transcontinental Railroad and the British development of railroads in India, with both undeniably marked by a complex web of history, modernization, and exploitation in the name of industrial progress.

Wíhaŋblapi Mázačhaŋku - Kite *

"Wihaŋblapi Mázačhaŋku" or "Railroad Dreams" is a new score by Oglala Lakota composer Kite, developed in collaboration with the Silkroad Ensemble members through workshops that employ a communal dreaming and visioning methodology. The Ensemble members thought about their dreams and translated them to a graphic, using the Lakota Shape Kit by designer Sadie Red Wing. Those dreams were then combined into a full visual score which is chiastic in structure, mirroring and encasing a central event in the timeline. This mirrored design structure is performed by the musicians, sonifying their

dreams through improvisation, drone, and Lakota melody.

Here is the visual score:



Rainy Day - Wu Man

This piece is based on a folk tune popular in Guangdong in southern China, and the melody reveals a touch of melancholy. I chose the combination of pipa, banjo and voice to tell a historical story of the Chinese railroad workers, with a slow and soulful melody expressing how the wives and mothers miss their husbands and sons who were building the railroad on the other side of the Pacific Ocean.

The Chinese pipa originated in Central Asia, and the American banjo came from Africa, both descended from traditional instruments that belong to the plucked strings family. I like the deep powerful sound of the banjo, combined with the gentle and rich character of the pipa. The dialogue between the two instruments brings an artistic charm that is both similar and unique. Of course, the vocal part represents the wife, mother, the storyteller. The magical female voice has always been in my mind when composing, I know that Ms. Rhiannon Giddens's voice will bring strong artistic appeal and imagination to the audience.

English Lyrics:
Rainy day, Rainy day oh
the rain falls on my side
without raincoat nor a hat on
drenched in rain oh
so pitiful

Chinese Lyrics: 落水天喽 落水天喽 落水落到 我身边喽 湿了衣裳 又无伞喽 光着头来 真可怜喽

Milimo - Niwel Tsumbu

"Milimo" is a Lingala word meaning spirits.

It was inspired by a repetitive riff that I played to my grandmother on an antique Congolese instrument known as the Zande harp. I didn't know much about the Zande harp except it's something people use as a decoration in the house. Once on a holiday trip to Congo from Ireland where I am based, I bought one as a souvenir and took it to visit my grandmother. She was lying down very sick getting ready to transition into the next life, but she suddenly got really happy when she saw me playing it. She told me that she hasn't seen one in many years. It used to be a very popular instrument but very quickly got out of fashion with the rise of the guitar in the 1940s.

I went back to Ireland and she passed not long after that. That is when the inspiration came to me to expand the riff that I played to her into a full composition on the guitar to her homage. I call it "Milimo" because every time I play it I see her smiling and in a broader sense I feel like it connects me to an ancient Congolese sentiment that's nearly extinct now.

I thought it would fit in well in this project as it was inspired by the Zande harp which would have been a popular instrument during the American railway constructions. Also it sounds much closer to the banjo than the crystal clear and resonant harp sound as we know.

I feel very honored and grateful Rhiannon Giddens asked me to bring a part of this project. Thanks very much to all the wonderful Silkroad musicians for learning it and bringing it to life. Last but not least, special thanks to Shawn Conley who took his time to score it out for everybody.

I dedicate it to my grandmother who I know will be watching, smiling and dancing from the spirit world.

INTERMISSION

Swannanoa Tunnel / Time Elapse - Wu Man, Arr. Zhang Haihui *

Cantonese, the earliest group of Chinese immigrants to the United States, brought a wealth of traditional music from the Guangdong region of China, including instrumental music, local opera, folk songs, story-teller, among others. In the piece, I have incorporated the distinctive characteristics of Cantonese folk music as creative materials, blending these characteristics with those of different Chinese and Western instruments. The narrative revolves around the early Chinese immigration experience, narrated from the perspective of music, particularly focusing on the story of a wife, mother, and children who deeply miss their husbands working thousands of miles away from their hometown in Guangdong.

The piece opens with a Chinese suona, percussion instruments, and Japanese flute and drums with high energy and passionate emotions. The Chinese sound structure is the main body of the piece, consisting of traditional Chinese percussion such as gongs, cymbals, and wooden-block. I use the Pipa as a female character throughout the piece, with dialogue exchanged between the strings and the Irish harp, and the human voice used to imitate the rhyme of the chanting in the traditional local Cantonese opera. The structure of the piece follows the slow-fast-slow characteristics of traditional Chinese music.

《流逝》

作曲吴蛮、编配张海辉

广东人是最早移民到美国的华人群体,他们从中国广东地区带来了丰富的传统音乐,包括器乐、地方戏曲、民歌说唱等。在这首作品中,我将广东民间音乐的鲜明特色作为创作素材,将这些特色与中西不同乐器的特点融为一体。故事围绕早期中国移

民的经历,从音乐的角度讲述,特别聚焦于妻子、母亲和孩子深深思念远在千里之外的广东家乡打工的丈夫的故事。

乐曲以中国唢呐、打击乐器、日本笛子、鼓声开场, 充满能量和激情。中国声音结构是该曲的主体, 由锣、钹、木板等中国传统打击乐器组成。整部作品我都用琵琶作为女性角色, 用弦乐和爱尔兰竖琴进行对话, 用人声模仿当地传统粤剧的唱腔。作品的结构遵循中国传统音乐慢-快-慢的特点。

Have You Seen My Man? - Cecile McLorin Salvant *

A hymn for voices, percussion, and pipa.

The sky is clear. A woman sings about her lover. She is intoxicated by the images she paints of him. He is on a train, flying away from her. Still she serenades, with her voice she weaves a tapestry of him, and falls in love with it. She walks along the train tracks, singing of her love. Her ambition is slowly winding like the tracks. It winds so slowly that she can't see that it is changing direction. And as it changes direction, she begins to doubt. When she sings, she is not alone. She is joined by the generations of wanderers, who wound and wove their hopes in song. They cannot ride the train, although it was built on their backs. So they walk along the train track with her.

Swannanoa Tunnel (quartet) - Traditional, arr. Silkroad Ensemble *

Fugaku Sanju Rokkei - Kaoru Watanabe

Improvisation based on the woodblock print series Thirty Six Views of Mt. Fuji by Katsushika Hokusai. Looking at one object from multiple perspectives, from the ocean, the land, in the morning and by moonlight. I recently saw Mt. Fuji from the serene comfort of a speeding bullet train - with modern technology, the perspective shift of the mountain was unnaturally, almost violently, fast.

Tamping Song - Haruka Fujii

While doing research for our project American Railroad, I was surprised to discover that after the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, Japanese immigrants became one of the dominant workforces; by 1906, over 13,000 Japanese immigrants were working for the

railroads. Later, under pressure, Japan would stop labor immigration to the United States via the Gentleman's Agreement of 1908. During this research I also discovered a recording of the "Tamping Song" — a railroad worker's song released on Columbia Records Japan in 1963. Using an inspirational melody from this song, my work weaves the ambition, dreams, and hopes of the immigrant workers on the front lines of the railroad construction in the US with the sentiment for their homeland.

Mahk Jchi - Pura Fé

O Shout! - Mazz Swift

O shout, O shout!

O shout away, and don't you mind And glory, glory, glory's in my soul

Music is a well known way with which enslaved people of the United States were able to communicate complex messages. Messages of hope, devotion, freedom and insurrection; hidden in plain sight.

Oh satan told me not to pray (Speaking of the white oppressors was coded, out of necessity.)

He wan' my soul at judgment day

But Glory, glory's in my soul (The love in this heart makes this soul too great to be owned or defeated.)

And everywhere I went to pray

There something was in my way (It is a much documented fact that enslaved people were punished severely, to the loss of limb and/or life itself for reading, writing or for practicing their own religion/s.)

Old foreman just like satan say (A newly added verse to further illustrate the correlation between evil and the oppressor's ways.)

Get back to work, ain't came to play (America's moralizing of work, and devaluing of rest has its roots in slavery, as most of our "values" do. I encourage us all to question everything.)

But glory, glory, Glory's in my soul! (All this and we still recognize the divine in all of us. That's the part that prevails. That's the part that redeems.)

*Commissioned by Silkroad for American Railroad, 2023

ABOUT THE VISUALS

The video that runs during this performance was designed by visual artist Camilla Tassi. In it you will see a visual juxtaposition of real historical photos with artwork created by artists from the cultures the show explores. For Pura Fé's pieces in particular, Pura Fé contributed personal family photos aimed at reminding audiences of Native peoples' important continued cultural presence in America.

Please refer to the end of this document for image citations.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Rhiannon Giddens

Voice, Banjo, Fiddle

Rhiannon Giddens has made a singular, iconic career out of stretching her brand of folk music, with its miles-deep historical roots and contemporary sensibilities, into just about every field imaginable. A two-time GRAMMY Award and Pulitzer Prize-winning singer and instrumentalist, MacArthur "Genius" grant recipient, and composer of opera, ballet, and film, Giddens has centered her work around the mission of lifting up people whose contributions to American musical history have previously been overlooked or erased, and advocating for a more accurate understanding of the country's musical origins through art.

As Pitchfork once said, "few artists are so fearless and so ravenous in their exploration"—a journey that has led to NPR naming her one of its 25 Most Influential Women Musicians of the 21st Century and to American Songwriter calling her "one of the most important musical minds currently walking the planet."

Shawn Conley

Bass

Hawaiian born bassist and composer Shawn Conley grew up loving all types of music. This love of diversity of sound developed into a career that straddles many genres. He has been playing with the Silkroad Ensemble for six years and is a member of the Brooklyn-based chamber orchestra The Knights. Recent projects include Silkroad's Grammy Award-winning album *Sing Me Home*, an upcoming release of the Brahms and Beethoven violin concertos with Gil Shaham and The Knights, the world premiere tour of Osvaldo Golijov's *Falling Out of Time* (commissioned by Silkroad), as well as an international tour of the new performance-art piece *The Head and the Load* created by South African visual artist William Kentridge. Shawn can also be heard on The Knights album *Azul*, featuring Silkroad founder Yo-Yo Ma.

As a studio musician, he has performed on multiple soundtracks including *True Grit, Moonrise Kingdom, Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close, The Vietnam War* documentary by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick, and the Amazon series *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*.

Shawn studied at Rice University with Paul Ellison and in Paris, France with Francois Rabbath. Shawn currently splits his time between Brooklyn, NY and Houston, TX with his wife Megan, and their son Osian.

Sandeep Das

Tabla

A Guggenheim Fellow, Sandeep Das is one of the leading Tabla virtuosos in the world today. Since his debut concert at the age of 17 with legendary Sitar player Ravi Shankar, Das has built a prolific international reputation spanning over three decades. He has collaborated with top musicians, ensembles, and orchestras from all over the world, and his original compositions have been performed in 50+ countries. Das is the founder of Harmony and Universality through Music (HUM), a nonprofit organization in India that has promoted global understanding through music performance and provided learning opportunities and scholarships for visually-impaired children with artistic potential since 2009. His most recent project, Transcending Borders One Note at a Time, launched in 2020 to widespread international acclaim, and seeks to harness the power of music to create positive social change.

Pura Fé

Lap-steel Slide Guitar, Voice

Pura Fé (Tuscarora/Taino) is an Indigenous activist, singer-songwriter, and storyteller known for her distinct, soulful vocals and for breathing life into several musical genres. Her work as a musician has brought her around the world to do work at festivals, benefits, in classrooms, online, and in the studio. As a Native activist and cultural leader, she has done work to combat the erasure of native culture, restore traditions, build community, fight corporate takeover of native land, and give a voice to those facing social injustice.

As the founding member of the internationally renowned Native Women's a cappella trio Ulali, Pura Fé helped to create a movement throughout Indian Country, which not only empowered Native Women's hand drum and harmony, but also built a bridge for Native music into the mainstream music scene. Pura Fé's solo career has produced six studio albums with her Native Blues and lap-steel slide guitar work. While touring Europe with Music Maker Blues Review under Dixie Frog and Nueva Onda French labels, she won Grand Prix du Disque from L'Académie Charls Cros (French Grammy) for Best World Album in 2006 for Tuscarora Nation Blues, and a Native American Music Award (NAMMY) for Best Female Artist for Follow Your Heart's Desire in the same year. Pura Fé and Ulali appeared in and consulted for the Rezolution Pictures Documentary RUMBLE: The Indians That Rocked The World, which won first place at the 2017 Sundance Film Festival. Pura Fé commented on her experience with the documentary, "This gave me a chance to reenact a piece of the historical birth of blues music that no one considers or hears about". Incumbent United States Poet Laureate, Joy Harjo once said, "We are systematically being written out of everything." To have a platform to help bring awareness to the mainstream was crucial to Pura Fé and Ulali. Today, Pura Fé lives in Canada and is writing a film for Rezolution Pictures. She is also working with First Nations dance and theater troops while recording a new album.

Haruka Fujii

Percussion

Multi-percussionist <u>Haruka Fujii</u> has won international acclaim for her interpretation of contemporary music, having commissioned and performed numerous premiere works from luminary living composers. She has appeared as a soloist with major orchestras including the Munich Philharmonic, Netherlands Chamber Orchestra, Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra Nationale de Lyon, and the NHK Symphony Orchestra. She performs with her mother Mustuko and sister Rika—both percussionists—as the Utari Duo and Fujii Trio. Her first solo recording, Ingredients, was released in 2013 by New Focus Recordings.

Yazhi Guo

Suona, Chinese Percussion

Co-founder and founding President of the American Academy of World Music, Yazhi Guo, is recognized by the industry as one of the best suona performers in the world, and he is committed to integrating Chinese music with world music.

Wu Man

Pipa

Pipa virtuoso and composer Wu Man is an ambassador of Chinese music, creating a new role for her lute-like instrument in both traditional and contemporary music. Brought up in the Pudong school of pipa playing, Wu Man became the first person to receive a master's degree in pipa performance from the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing. She is a frequent collaborator with the Kronos Quartet and Shanghai Quartet, and has performed in recital and as soloist with major orchestras around the world, regularly premiering new works. Wu Man has appeared on more than 40 albums, including a Grammy winner with the Silkroad Ensemble ("Best World Music Album") and five additional Grammy nominees. She was named Musical America's 2013 Instrumentalist of the Year, but the best measure of her achievement is that her instrument, which dates back 2000 years, is no longer an exotic curiosity.

Karen Ouzounian

Cello, Voice

Praised for her "radiant" and "expressive" performances (The New York Times), cellist Karen Ouzounian is a winner of the S&R Foundation's 2016 Washington Award and at home in diverse musical settings. She is a founding member of the Aizuri Quartet, which was awarded the Grand Prize at the 2018 M-Prize Chamber Arts Competition, First Prize at the 2017 Osaka International Chamber Music Competition in Japan, and was the String Quartet-in-Residence at the Metropolitan Museum of Art for its 2017-18 season. Its debut album, Blueprinting, was released by New Amsterdam Records in 2018. Her commitment to adventurous repertoire and the collaborative process has led to her membership in the Grammy-nominated chamber orchestra A Far Cry, and the critically-acclaimed new music collective counter)induction. She has performed internationally with Orpheus Chamber Orchestra and The Knights, as soloist with the Orlando Philharmonic and Philharmonic Orchestra of Santiago, on tour with Musicians from Marlboro, and in recital at the Caramoor Center for Music and the Arts. Born to Armenian parents in Toronto, Karen holds master's and bachelor's degrees from The Juilliard School, where she was a student of Timothy Eddy.

Mazz Swift

Violin, Voice

Critically acclaimed as one of America's most talented and versatile performers today, Violin/Vox/Freestyle Composition artist Mazz Swift has engaged audiences all over the world with the signature weaving of song, melody and improvisation that they call MazzMuse. As a singer, composer and Juilliard-trained violinist who plays electronic and acoustic instruments, Mazz has performed and recorded with a diverse accumulation of artists including The Silkroad Ensemble, William Parker, Butch Morris, Jason Lindner, James "Blood" Ulmer, Vernon Reid, Valerie June, Whitney Houston, DJ Logic, Kanye West, D'Angelo. Mx. Swift is a 2021 United States Artist and 2019 Jerome Hill Artist Fellow, currently working on a series of compositions that involve conducted improvisation, and that are centered around protest, spirituals, and the Ghanaian concept of 'Sankofa': looking back to learn how to move forward.

Niwel Tsumbu

Guitar, Voice

Niwel Tsumbu is a guitarist and singer who grew up with the hip-swinging Soukous music from the Democratic Republic Of The Congo. Strongly influenced by guitarists such as Paco de Lucia, Luambo Makiadi, Baden Powell and Joe Pass, Niwel Tsumbu has amalgamated these different styles and blurred the boundaries of African, Classical and Jazz music with his amazing virtuosity, passion and graceful guitar playing.

Francesco Turrisi

Accordion, Frame Drums

Francesco Turrisi has been defined as a "musical alchemist" and a "musical polyglot." He has released five critically acclaimed albums as a leader and two as co-leader ("Tarab" a cross boundary innovative ensemble that blends Irish and Mediterranean traditional music, and "Zahr" a project that looks at connections between southern Italian traditional music and Arabic music).

Kaoru Watanabe

Japanese Flutes, Percussion

Acclaimed composer and instrumentalist Kaoru Watanabe's melodic, authentic and engaging music focuses on points of connection: the joints between Western jazz and Japanese theater and folk traditions and political action, the ancient and the all-too-contemporary. Born into a musical family, Watanabe began his training at a young age, eventually graduating from the Manhattan School of Music, then devoting a decade overseas performing with and ultimately leading the world-renowned Taiko drum performance group Kodo. His ten years in Japan profoundly influenced Watanabe's practice. His signature skill of infusing Japanese culture to disparate styles has made him a much-in-demand collaborator, having worked with Wes

Anderson, Yo-Yo Ma, Mikhail Baryshnikov, Laurie Anderson, Jason, and Alicia Hall Moran, Bando Tamasaburo, Eva Yerbabuena, and Zakir Hussain, among many others. Whether writing for solo performances, interdisciplinary ensembles, film, or symphony orchestras, he regularly explores social justice, history, and heritage issues.

Michi Wiancko

Violin, Voice

Michi Wiancko is a violinist and composer whose creative work encompasses a wide spectrum of new composition, collaboration, and interpretation. Her recent commissions include works for Boston Chamber Music Society, Carnegie Hall's Ensemble Connect, Friction Quartet, as well as re-composition projects for Orpheus Chamber Orchestra and The Knights. Her solo album, Planetary Candidate, was released on New Amsterdam Records to critical acclaim. In addition to her composition and performing career, Michi is director and curator of Antenna Cloud Farm, a music festival, arts retreat, and community organization based in western Massachusetts and founded The Experimental Institute, a summer intensive for talented performers that centers creative artistry and liberatory practice.

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